

THE  AGE

How Melbourne reacted when Britain declared war with Germany

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Crowds gather in Melbourne to see off the First Australian Division.

For 26 years after **Federation**, Melbourne was the capital of Australia. So, a century ago today, when Britain declared war with Germany, it was in Melbourne that the nation's leaders **convened**.

The governor-general, who lived at Melbourne's Government House until 1930, was first to get the news via cable from London. Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson received the telegram at 12.30pm on August 5 and promptly informed the state governors, war had broken out with Germany.

The Liberal government elected just a year before and led by Sir Joseph Cook, immediately offered an expeditionary force of 20,000 men following a Melbourne meeting of cabinet.

But while those in power met in the city's grand Victorian buildings or the bluestone barracks of the nation's army headquarters on St Kilda Road, Melburnians headed for the streets.

This was a time before broadband, when news travelled on the **human grapevine**. So the obvious place to gather information was in the streets and outside the offices of the city's newspapers. Outside *The Age* building on Collins Street, the crush was so great the police arrived to keep order.

"The cables came across to the newspaper offices saying that Britain had declared war and there was great cheering," said military historian Michael McKernan.

The enthusiastic crowd outside *The Age* even managed to drown out a spontaneous Scottish piper.

Author of *Victoria at War 1914-1918*, to be launched on Wednesday, Dr McKernan said the sense of jubilation in the city of 670,000 was **palpable**.

In the city's tearooms, concentrated around the fashionable Block Arcade, small orchestras were pumping out patriotic tunes with added enthusiasm.

Two days after war was declared, the Melbourne Town Hall was at capacity. Outside a crowd strained in the winter air, optimistic of squeezing into the **cavernous** room. The colour scheme for the night and for much of the war reflected the overwhelming sense of

1. Which war do you think the title is referring to? How do you know?

2. Look at the picture on the left. How do we know that it is an old picture of Melbourne? List **three** clues that suggest this is an old picture.

3. What is Federation and when did it occur in Australia?

4. Which city is the capital of Australia now?

5. What does the reference "human grapevine" refer to?

6. What is a synonym for cavernous?

<p>loyalty to empire: the red, white and blue of the Union Jack.</p> <p>At Government House, the Australian branch of the British Red Cross Society was established just nine days after war was declared.</p> <p>Such was the confidence that war would conclude quickly, the flurry to enlist was in part informed by a fear of missing out. In July 1915 alone, Victoria surpassed the initial national target when 21,000 men signed up.</p> <p>State Library of Victoria exhibition curator Ann Carew said the enthusiasm and jubilation that met the outbreak of war shone through in contemporary reports and photographs.</p> <p>"The enthusiasm for enlisting astonished me," she said. "And even the authorities had no idea they would get so many so quickly."</p> <p>However, with the Boer War a recent memory and the cadet movement well established, this was a state equipped to serve.</p> <p>"It was a military period," she said. "People were quite well trained when the war broke out."</p> <p>It was, however, a city divided by class, Dr McKernan notes. Working-class Richmond with its substantial Catholic population contributed more than any other suburb in the country to the Australian Imperial Force, with about 2000 recruits enlisting during World War I. Meanwhile, middle-class Camberwell saw 255 sign up and South Yarra 533.</p> <p>The Victorian Education Department put in a sterling effort. By the end of 1916, more than £140,000 had been raised by students for the war relief effort. Students donated money from their paper rounds or from manning stalls selling home-made goods.</p> <p>"The speed with which people responded was one of the most extraordinary aspects of the whole thing."</p> <p>An operating theatre at Caulfield Military Hospital was equipped using £2000 raised by Red Cross women from Birchip in the Mallee. The money, raised from regular Saturday afternoon teas, was donated in 1917.</p> <p>"It shows how amazingly involved the Victoria community was in doing whatever it took to look after the soldiers at war and those who came back so badly damaged," Dr McKernan said.</p>	<p>7. Why do you think there was a "flurry to enlist" to go to war?</p>
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DISCUSSION

Vocabulary

Palpable, convened, cavernous

Questions for Discussion

1. If there were just three key pieces of information to take from this article, what would they be?
2. Put them in order of most important to least important.
3. Justify why you have chosen to place each of these pieces of information in this order
4. What do you know about the First World War? Why do you think there were so many people that were keen to enlist and fight in the war? Do you think Victorians would react any differently if a war broke out in modern times? Why do you think people's response to war might have changed?